English 594 Contemporary Literature and Culture
Professor Comer
Fall 2018

Monday 2-4:50p
Class: Herring 224
Office Hours W 1:30-3 + appt.

Critical Regionalisms

We are at least a couple of decades deep in scholarship related to the spatial turn in critical theory. Across social sciences and humanities, spatial analyses have contributed much of what scholars know about globalization, space-time compression, transnational cultural and literary circulations, and contemporary aesthetics. New tools (GIS technologies) and scales for spatial work continue to emerge.

Critical regionalism is, generally speaking, a political/spatial framework. It attends to the changed status of regions in the new geographies of power occasioned by recent global economic restructurings and new technologies. Familiar regions – like the regions of postwar Area Studies or the regions of US political history (the South, the West) – have emerged as new global forces. "Other" regions have become newly or differently legible, and in the process, have realigned local/regional/urban alliances. "Critical regionalism" captures conceptually these transformations and makes sense of new political networks, possibilities, cultural forms, and spatial tensions. Our seminar takes up divergent work about critical regionalism, applying insights to our own work and disciplinary fields. Key topics include:

- the importance of place as a category of power
- the spatial turn, late capitalism, and cultural effects of modes of flexible accumulation
- settler occupation, indigenous cultural theory, decolonial knowledge/inhabitations
- the limits of "the global" and "the transnational" as analytic frames
- regional and translocal activist networks that navigate globalized structures
- issues of statecraft and democracy in an era of softened national borders
- relation of regionalism to theories of politics of location (feminist, critical race, postcolonial)
- poetics, placemaking, worlding
- feminist geographical thinking
- queer dwelling, geographies, temporalities
- petroculture, environment, feminist materialism, animals, and the sacred

Required (available in bookstore). McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992); Waldie, *Holy Land* (1996); Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996); Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (1997); Butler & Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State*? (2007); Erdrich, *The Round House* (2012). **Recommended**: Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction* (2nd ed., 2014).

Critical Readings & Films (**CANVAS). Soja, Harvey, Massey, Frampton, Tuck & Yang, Mignolo, bell hooks, J. Hillis Miller, Appadurai, José Saldívar, Limerick, Jodi Byrd, Susan Kollin, Neil Campbell, Stephen Tatum, Van Houten, Powell, Chiang & Wong, Tsing, LeManager, Povinelli, Kirby Brown, Joanna Hearne. Required films (available CANVAS): *Smoke Signals* (1998), *20th Century Women* (2016), *The Rider* (2018).

Assignments. Short paper, final research paper, presentation, and informal reading responses.

Learning Outcomes – Students will be able to

- demonstrate an understanding of some of the major epistemological traditions related to the spatial turn in critical theory across the humanities and social science
- understand, critique, and/or build on examples of critical regionalism as methodological orientations
- address a range of ethical and political issues and dilemmas in studies of place and space including those particular to Indigenous peoples in the US
- demonstrate an understanding of explicitly feminist geographical thinking
- identify specific sites of spatial inquiry as of significance to individual projects/disciplines and demonstrate engagement with that inquiry and concern
- reflect orally and in writing on one's own histories and situation/emplacement as a knowledge producer and relations of these locations to research practices
- demonstrate in final research paper attention to some particular spatial or critical regional problem or topic and show its relevance to student's disciplinary training and to spatial critical theory
- practice oral discussion and presentation skills in a tone conducive to collegiality

Assignments & Grades. Two essays, short reading responses, short class presentation, participation.

The first essay (5-7 pages, due October 19, 20% of grade) explicates theoretical material of your choice. The aim of the essay is for students to work on a theoretical concern and to benefit from instructor comments earlier in the term. This is not an interpretive assignment, its goal is a faithful rendering of material with the possibility of using the work, in revised form, for the final research project. Think of it as a draft of a literature or methods review. **The second essay** is article length (20-25 pages with notes and bibliography). It puts the course materials in conversation with student research interests and germane field debates. It is due the last day of exams, Dec. 12, and is worth 40% of your grade. I will provide handouts with prompt questions/directions for each essay.

We also have three short (2 page) **reading summaries**, due in class, worth 20% of your grade, and for which you will find a handout on CANVAS. Due dates: September 10, October 1, November 5. The responses are less-formal pieces of writing that help students to stay current with the readings and try out ideas. They allow more frequent comments on evolving student work.

Please note that essay #1 is submitted in hard copy form, and the final essay should be submitted by email. Hard copies can be handed in to my box in the English Dept. offices on the second floor of Herring Hall. Note the office closes at 4:30pm. Emails to kcomer@rice.edu. Late papers require advance permission and receive small grade reductions except where university policy grants exceptions for extenuating circumstance.

Short presentations (15 minutes, 10% of your grade) will begin the week of September 17 (week 5). Presentations allow you a chance to talk, in seminar formats, about what interests you, important questions raised by a reading, or your understanding of the context or situation out of which a particular thinker makes arguments. Presentations are meant to offer practice in effective participation in a "theory reading group" kind of context. They are not presentations of research. Presentations should

conclude by raising a couple of discussion questions, and we will talk more about how to formulate good questions. If you like, one of your reading response summaries can be a write up of your presentation.

Participation includes attendance, preparation, questions students bring to class discussion, and student comments in discussion (worth 10% of grade).

Additional Policies

Disability Accommodation
Rice University is committed to equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. In keeping with the university's mission to provide an unsurpassed education, Disability Support Services (DSS) provides accommodations and support services. If you have a registered need, please see me and I will accommodate you; also be sure to visit DSS.

Policy on Electronic Devices in the Classroom
Refrain from all electronic activities unrelated to our class while the class is in session. This means don't check FB, email. The policy allows laptops/phones as long as their use is exclusively educational. Violation of the policy results in course participation grade reductions.

Policy on attendance and late arrival. ALWAYS COME TO CLASS.
Come to class, even if you are tired, late, or underprepared. You will always do better in the class (this or any class) if you attend regularly. This is especially true during the most hectic parts of the semester.

Office Hours
Please note office hours on page 1. I have scheduled one day a week, with "by appointment" for other times, so all students can be accommodated. If you want to talk about the class, your writing, upcoming assignments, or some other matter, you are welcome. Sooner is better than later if you have a concern.

I. Introductions:
The Spatial Turn in Contexts of Thinking Otherwise

Week 1	**Overview**
Aug 20 M	Placing Ourselves Where are we? Where are the "wheres" of our intellectual trainings? --Introductions --In class screening of *Opal* (2014), dir. Ramona Emerson (Navajo) experimental short "reztern" or Indigenous Western. Thanks to Susan Bernardin, Joanna Hearne --M.A.M.O.N. - Latinos vs. Donald Trump short film cortometraje https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q__bSi5rBlw

Week 2	**Theorizing the Spatial Turn**
Aug 27 M	Frampton, "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points Toward an Architecture of Resistance" (1983) **
	Edward Soja, "History: Geography: Modernity," "It All Comes Together in Los Angeles," from *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) 10-33, 190-222 **
	Harvey, "The Passage from Modernity to Postmodernity in Contemporary Culture," "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation," and "Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition," *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into Cultural Change* (1990) 1-65; 141-172; 284-307. **
	Doreen Massey, "Flexible Sexism," *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space* (1991, v 9) 31-57 **
Week 3	**Labor Day**
Sept 3 M	No Class
Week 4	**Place / Accountabilities / Decoloniality**
Sept 10 M	"Introduction," "Conceptualizing Place," "Decolonizing Perspectives on Place," from Tuck & McKenzie, *Place Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (2015)** 1-74
	"Introduction" + Part One. Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997)** 1-81
	bell hooks, "Preface: To Know Where I'm Going," "Kentucky is My Fate," from *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (2009), 1-24**
	Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference" (2002) reprinted in *Coloniality at Large* (2008) (response to Appadurai) 57-96 **
	Kirby Brown, "Keyword: Sovereignty," *Western American Literature*

(2018) 81-89. **

Recommended: Tim Cresswell, "Introduction" and "Genealogies of Place" from *Place: An Introduction* (2nd edition, 2014) 1-61. **

Reading Response Due

II.
New Geographies of Power
Regionalisms, Frontiers, Borders, Critical Regionalisms

Week 5 **Genealogies . . . Civil Rights/Feminist/Queer/Sovereignty Movements**

Sept 17 M Landscapes, Borders, Frontiers

Comer, "Introduction: Postmodernism, Literary Nationalism, and Western Cultural Production," and "Landscapes of Westernness: Gender, Race, and the Politics of American Spaces," from *Landscapes of the New West: Gender & Geography in Contemporary Women's Writing* (1999) 1-60.

Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Closing the Frontier and Opening Western History," from *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987) 1-22.

Anzaldúa, "The Homeland: Aztlán," and "Movimientos de Rebeldía u Las Culturas que Traicionan," *from Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) 1-23**

José David Saldívar, "Introduction: Tracking Borders," and "Cultural Theory in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands," from *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997) 1-35.**

Jodi Byrd, "Introduction: Indigenous Critical Theory & the Diminishing Returns of Civilization," "Is and Was: Poststructural Indians Without Ancestry," from *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011) 1-39.

Week 6 **Region, Transnationalism, "the Global"**

Sep 24 M Postwestern . . . Postregionalism . . . Critical Regionalism

Susan Kollin, "Postwestern Studies: Dead or Alive," from *Postwestern Culture: Literature, Theory, Space* (2007) xi-xvi

Stephen Tatum, "Spectrality and the Postregional Interface," from *Postwestern Culture* (2007) . . . 3-30

Neil Campbell, "Toward an Expanded Critical Regionalism," from *Rhizomatic West: Representing the West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (2008) 41-74

Comer, "Thinking Otherwise Across Global Wests: Issues of Mobility and Feminist Critical Regionalism," *Occasion: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Humanities* (2016) https://arcade.stanford.edu/occasion/thinking-otherwise-across-global-wests-issues-mobility-and-feminist-critical-regionalism

Recommended: José Limon, "Border Literary Histories, Critical Regionalism, Globalization," *American Literary History* (2008)**

Recommended: Creswell, "Place in a Mobile World," "Reading 'A Global Sense of Place,'" from *Place: an Introduction* 62-114.

Week 7 **Reading Exercise #1**
Critical, Post-, Classic . . . What Where When Why West?

Oct 1 M Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992)

III.
Selected Critical Regionalisms

Week 8 **Midterm Recess**

Oct 8 M no class

Week 9 **Thinking Democracy & Statecraft After Area Studies**

Oct 15 M Butler & Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation State? Language, Belonging, Politics* (2007)

Oct 19 F **First Paper DUE**

Week 10 **Activist Networks & New Publics**

Oct 22 M

Comer, "Surfeminism, Critical Regionalism, Public Scholarship." Ed. Zavzala Hough-Snee & Eastman. *The Critical Surf Studies Reader* (2017) 235-262. **

Comer, "Beaches as Spaces of Democracy," Stanford . . . *& the West Blog* (2017) https://west.stanford.edu/news/beaches-spaces-democracy-center-hosts-women-surfers-conference

Cristina Van Houten, "bell hooks, Critical Regionalism, and the Politics of Ecological Returns," https://politicsandculture.org/2014/03/09/bell-

Stephanie LeManager, from "Prologue" and "Introduction," from *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (2014) 1-19 **

Chiang & Wong, "Asia is Burning: Queer Asia as Critique," *Culture, Theory, and Critique*) 2017; "Queering The Transnational Turn: Regionalism and Queer Asias, *Gender Place & Culture* (2016) **

TBA Anna Tsing (from *Friction*) or Elizabeth Povinelli (from *Geontologies*)

Recommended: Creswell, "Working with Place – Creating Places," "Working with Place – Anachorism," from *Place: an Introduction* 115-94

WLA Attendees: (n.b. José Limón 10.25 "Streets of Laredo")

Week 11 **Regionality as Worlding**

Oct 29 M

Experimental Ethnography

Katie Stewart, Selections from *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Prologue, Chapters 1, 2, 9)

Neil Campbell, "From Regionalism to Regionality," and "Kathleen Stewart: Fictocritical Regionality" from *Affective Critical Regionality* (2016) **

Recommended:
Kathleen Stewart, "On Regionality" (2013) **
Kathleen Stewart, "Precarity's Form" (recent AAA paper) **

"In the World That Affect Proposed" *Cultural Anthropology* (2017) **

Reports from group attending Western Literature Association

Part IV.
Syntheses . . . & Reading Exercises

Week 12	**Case #1** **What Can Critical Regional Readings "Do?"** **The City-Region of Los Angeles**
Nov 5 M	D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (1997)
Week 13	**Case #2** **Sovereignties, Feminisms, & Violence Against Women**
Nov 12 M	Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), *The Round House* (2012)

Reading Response DUE

Week 14	**Case #3** **Westerns . . .**
Nov 19 M	Discussion of Film Cluster
	Smoke Signals (1998) Eyre, dir. *20th Century Women* (2016) Mills, dir. *The Rider* (2018) Zhao, dir.
Week 15	**Hear Hear!**
Nov 26 M	Final Paper Workshop / Highlights